Met Office

NEWS

#3wordweather

Author: Press Office
12:41 (UTC) on Tue 13 Feb 2018

'Baltic', 'sad' and 'chucking it down', the Met Office considers targeted weather updates with regional slang to avoid misinterpretation.

- The language of weather: The most popular slang terms for rain revealed (per region)
- A symbol mistake**:** UK public often misinterpret weather symbols
- #3wordweather**:** The Met Office needs your help, from February 1st the Met Office invites the public to describe their local weather in 3 words. This information will be used to inform how the weather forecast is presented in the future.

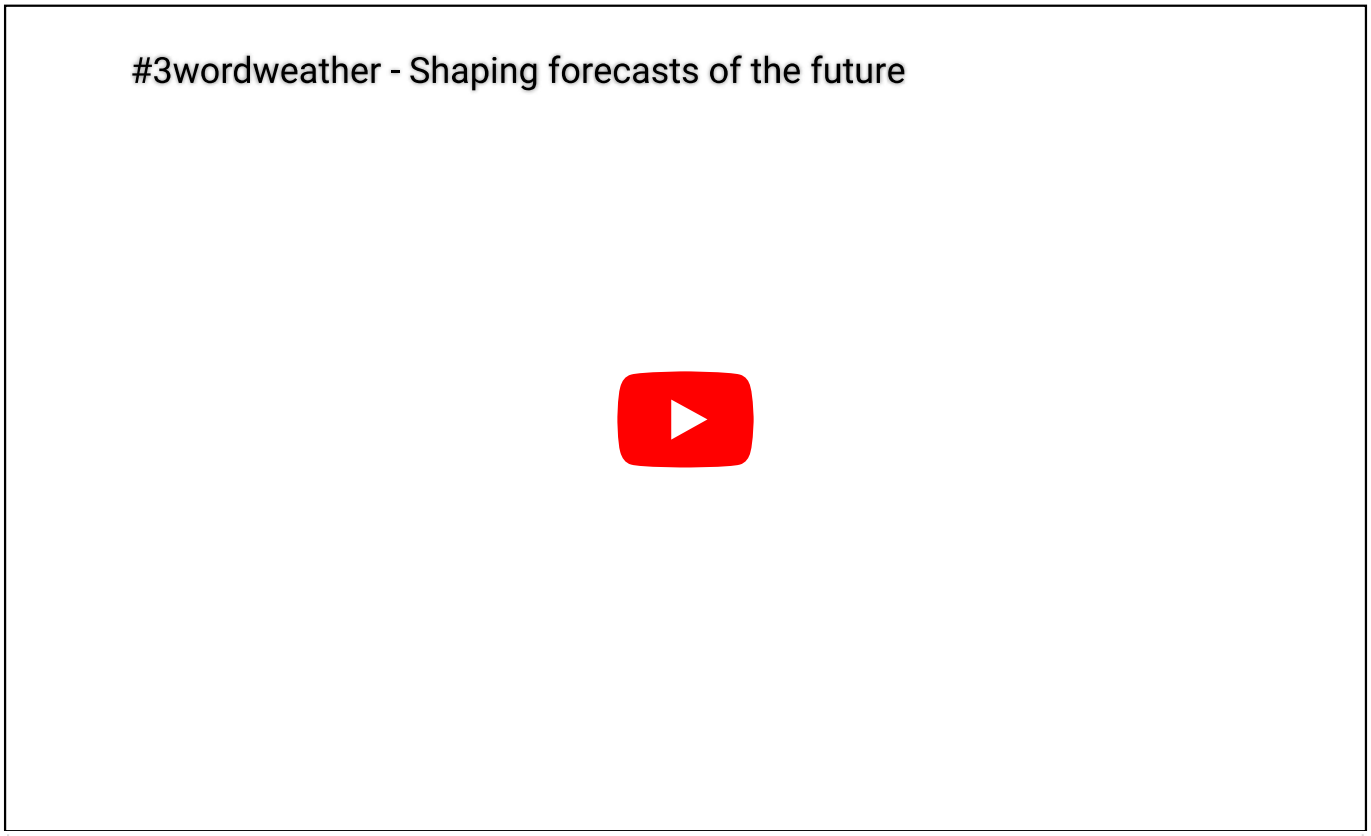
When it comes to weather, Britain has always had a fascination with slang terms – particularly when describing torrential rain. Whether it's raining cats and dogs, pelting it down or bucketing, the glossary is as inventive as it is diverse but the broad range of terminology can make it even harder to communicate the weather forecast, according to new research from the Met Office. And it's not just the words that forecasters use to communicate the weather that are causing confusion, it turns out that weather symbols are confusing too.

A pilot survey from the Met Office recently highlighted the different perceptions and use of language to describe rain across the country. The Met Office is now appealing to the public to help them identify the words they use to describe the weather in their area.

Although the term 'pouring' is the most widely used word to describe heavy rain nationally, the cities of Cardiff, Brighton and Liverpool were found to favour 'pissing it down' (42%, 38% and 35% respectively). Mancunians, meanwhile, were revealed as the most likely to say that rain was 'lashing it down', with half (57%) of people surveyed in the Black Country preferring to say 'bucketing'.

The people of Newcastle and Leeds apparently like the term 'chucking it down', with 6 in 10 people from Newcastle (60%) and 58% of people in Leeds describing torrential rain this way. Although many might assume that those in Cambridge and Oxford would avoid the use of slang, each similarly favoured the term 'chucking it' to describe heavy rain (83% and 57%).

Glaswegians are most likely to use the term ‘pelting it’ and Londoners prefer to say ‘caning it’. Despite being almost 90 miles apart, the people of Birmingham and Bristol share the use of ‘tipping it down’, with 44% and 41% saying this respectively. Amusingly, a fifth (18%) of people in Southampton claim to break into song when it rains heavily, performing renditions of ‘it’s raining, pouring, the old man is snoring’.



Top 10 most popular terms for heavy rain
Pouring (down)
Chucking (it)
Pissing (it down)
Lashing (down)
Bucketing (down)
Raining cats and dogs
The heavens have opened
Properly (raining)

Derrick Ryall, Head of Public Weather Service at the Met Office, comments: “The range of slang for rain alone demonstrates the breadth and diversity of the English language and the varying terminology used across different parts of the UK.

“As the UK’s National Weather Service, we’re always looking to improve the way weather forecasts are communicated, to make them as useful as possible and increase their understanding. We’re asking the public to

help us better understand how they talk about the weather by describing it in just 3 words on Twitter, giving us their location and using the hashtag #3wordweather.

“Ultimately we hope to use the insights from our research to tap into local dialects and vocabulary to make it easier for people across the UK to understand the forecast and make informed decisions based on it.”

Symbolic of the problem

In its survey, the Met Office found that language may not be the only barrier to interpretation, many Brits are also struggling to identify common weather symbols. Indeed, almost half of respondents (48%) were unsure which icon represented intermittent rain, with only one in 10 (14%) able to identify the symbol for sleet. Although Brits are well-used to bad weather, 81% incorrectly thought a grey cloud symbol meant there would be a high potential for rain. Amazingly, only a fifth (22%) correctly identified all symbols for rainfall.

Unsurprisingly, Brits proved they are strangers to symbols for sunny weather, with 53% mistakenly thinking the sun symbol means it will be warm or hot outside, despite it not denoting temperature. Although more of a grey area, two-thirds (65%) also misinterpreted the symbol for overcast weather [when almost all of the sky is cloud covered] as being generally cloudy, with a third (29%) mistakenly thinking that the symbol of a sun, cloud and snowflake indicates a chance of precipitation.

Derrick Ryall continues: “We have used a common set of symbols and vocabulary to describe the weather for over 40 years and it’s important that they are still relevant. It’s become apparent from recent studies that different regions interpret language and information uniquely. For example, in January we found that two-fifths of people living in London described 15 degrees Celsius as being cold, whereas three quarters of people in East Anglia, Wales and the South West identified it as being warm. This one example shows how polarised reactions to the same information can be, and why it’s critical that we use symbols, descriptions and terminology that people understand.”

Intent on determining the most accurate language to describe weather based on regional dialects, the Met Office is inviting the British public to have their say. And so, from February 1st, it is inviting people to join the #3wordweather debate on Twitter, a chance for local communities to summarise their perceptions of local weather in three words and in doing so help the Met Office improve its daily communications.

“As the UK’s weather authority nobody knows the weather better than us and we’re continually looking at how we can improve our service. #3wordweather could be the first step to redefining how we talk about the weather in future,” continued Ryall. “Who knows, in time, to avoid misinterpretation, this could mean providing targeted regional weather reports in local dialects.”

[See your weather words live on the Met Office map.]

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